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ABSTRACT

In 1989, a study was conducted of the persistence and graduation rates of full-time, degree-seeking students who enrolled in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) for the first time in fall 1981 through fall 1986. Persistence was determined by the presence of the student in the enrolled student database, regardless of whether the student continued to enroll on a full-time basis or in their original program. Graduation rates were determined by the presence of the student in the list of persons receiving an associate degree, excluding those who attained certificates or diplomas. Study findings indicated: (1) about 70% of the students persisted to the spring quarter of their first year, about 55% returned for the second year, and about 45% were still enrolled in the spring of their second year; (2) while there was no significant difference in the persistence of transfer and occupational students, occupational students were somewhat more likely to graduate than transfer degree students; (3) except for students entering the VCCS in 1982, who had higher graduation rates than other cohorts, the graduation rates of full-time students varied little from year to year; and (4) fewer than 10% of the students graduated by the end of two years; however, this figure more than doubled by the end of the fourth year. (WJT)

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ED314129

Persistence and Graduation Rates of Full-Time Degree Students Enrolling for the First Time in the Fall Quarter 1981 through the Fall Quarter 1986

by

Don Puyear

JC 900 060

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The assistance of Dr. Earl McHewitt, Research Coordinator in the Research and Planning Section of the VCCS System Office, in extracting data from the VCCS student information system data base is gratefully acknowledged. Dr. McHewitt's helpfulness, skill, and diligence made this study feasible.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents iii

List of Figures iv

Introduction 1

Summary of Results 2

Observations

- Student Persistence 3
- Effect of Program Type on Student Persistence 4
- Degree Graduation Rates 7
- Effect of Program Type on Degree Graduation Rates 8

Discussion 10

Appendix: Data 11

List of Figures

Figure 1. New Full-Time Student Persistence 3

Figure 2. Student Persistence by Program Type, 1981 Cohort 4

Figure 3. Student Persistence by Program Type, 1982 Cohort 4

Figure 4. Student Persistence by Program Type, 1983 Cohort 4

Figure 5. Student Persistence by Program Type, 1984 Cohort 5

Figure 6. Student Persistence by Program Type, 1985 Cohort 5

Figure 7. Student Persistence by Program Type, 1986 Cohort 5

Figure 8. Degree Graduation Rates 7

Figure 9. Degree Graduation Rates by Program, 1981 Cohort..... 8

Figure 10. Degree Graduation Rates by Program, 1982 Cohort..... 8

Figure 11. Degree Graduation Rates by Program, 1983 Cohort..... 8

Figure 12. Degree Graduation Rates by Program, 1984 Cohort..... 9

Figure 13. Degree Graduation Rates by Program, 1985 Cohort..... 9

Figure 14. Degree Graduation Rates by Program, 1986 Cohort..... 9

Persistence and Graduation Rates of Full-Time Degree Students Enrolling for the First Time in the Fall Quarter 1981 through the Fall Quarter 1986

INTRODUCTION

The persistence and graduation rates of new full-time degree students enrolling in the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) in the fall quarters from 1981 through 1986 were investigated. The effect of the type of program on these rates was also explored.

New full-time degree students were selected for this study in an attempt to have a group for which it was reasonable to believe that most of the members intended to pursue their community college program on a full-time basis and expected to graduate in approximately two years.[1] These terms have a specific meaning in the VCCS: *new students* have not previously attended college except possibly in the summer session immediately preceding the fall quarter; *full-time students* are enrolled in courses totalling at least twelve credit hours; *degree students* have been admitted to an associate degree program, so they have few or no remediation requirements. This is about as close as one can come to defining a "typical college student," who is by no means a typical community college student. Persistence was determined by the presence of the student in the enrolled student data base in subsequent terms without regard to whether the student remained in a full-time status or remained in the original program. Degree graduation rates were determined by the presence of the student in the list of persons receiving an associate degree. Certificate and diploma graduations were not included.

This study was intended to provide an overview of major trends and to suggest areas for more detailed study.

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[1] A recent survey of VCCS students confirms this expectation. See Julie A. Honnold and Scott Keeter, *Survey of Enrollment Decisions of Virginia Community College Students*, prepared for the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia by the Survey Research Laboratory of Virginia Commonwealth University, October 20, 1989.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Both persistence rates and degree graduation rates were remarkably consistent from year to year. Many students persisted well beyond the nominal two years. The number of students graduating in the third and fourth years exceeded the number who graduated in two years. These are significant findings that should be studied more thoroughly.

Student persistence was about the same for both university parallel and occupational degree students. In four of the six cohorts studied, however, occupational students had very slightly higher persistence rates in the second year of enrollment.

There were more dramatic differences in degree graduation rates. Occupational students were consistently more likely to graduate with an associate degree than were transfer students.

OBSERVATIONS

Student Persistence

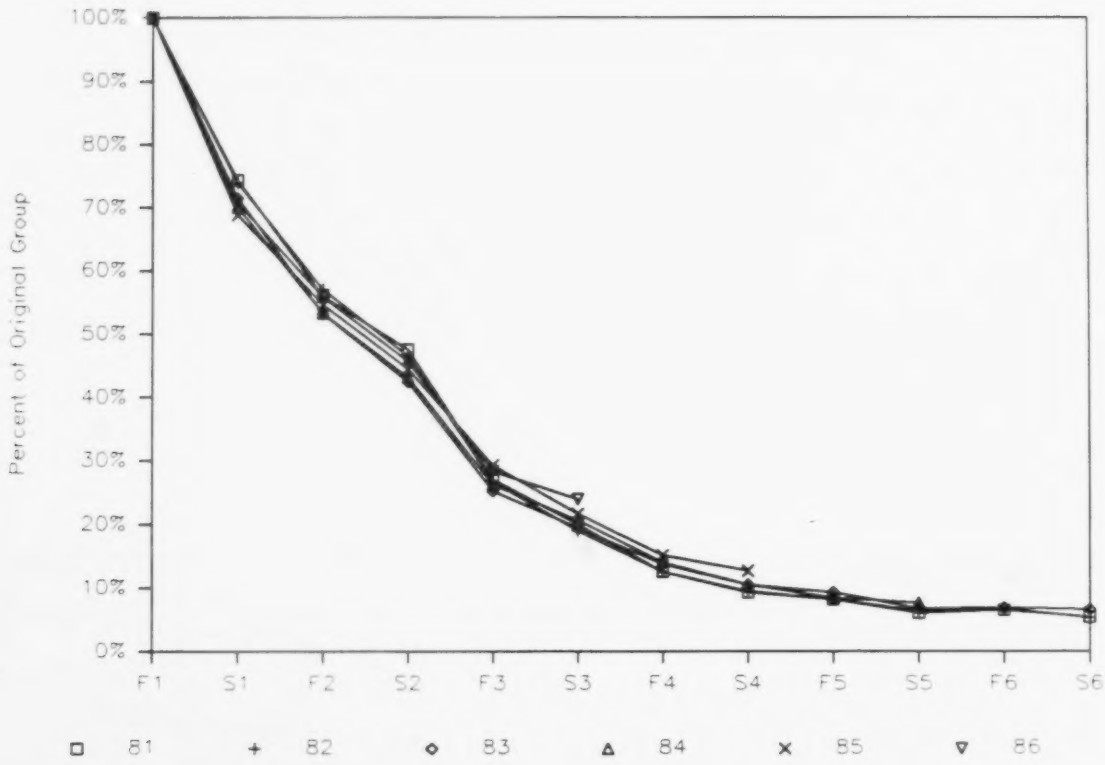

Figure 1. New Full-Time Degree Student Persistence

About 70% of the students persisted to the spring quarter of their first year, about 55% returned for the second year, and about 45% were still enrolled in the spring of their second year. There was remarkably little variation in these rates from year to year.

The VCCS moved to a semester calendar in the summer of 1988. Improved fall-to-spring retention[2] can be seen in the 1985 and 1986 cohorts (F4 to S4 for the 1985 cohort; F3 to S3 for the 1986 cohort).

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[2]Improved retention under the semester calendar was reported by the author in *Semesters, Enrollment, and Retention: The Effect of Converting from Quarters to Semesters on Enrollment and Retention in the Virginia Community System*, Virginia Community College System, August, 1989.

Effect of Program Type on Student Persistence

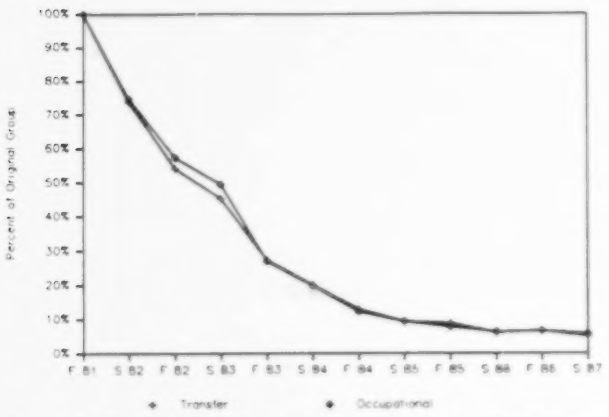

Figure 2. Student Persistence by Program Type, 1981 Cohort

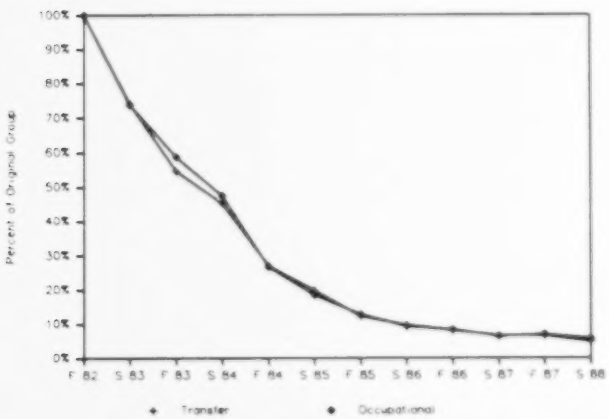

Figure 3. Student Persistence by Program Type, 1982 Cohort

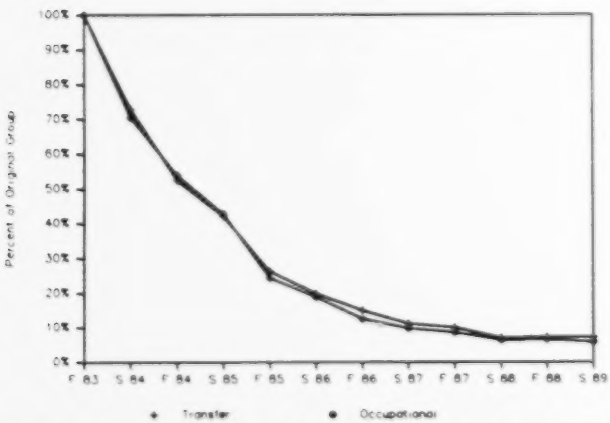

Figure 4. Student Persistence by Program Type, 1983 Cohort

Except for very slightly higher persistence rates for occupational students in the second year for the 1981, 1982, 1985, and 1986 cohorts, there does not appear to be any systematic difference between the persistence of transfer degree students and occupational degree students.

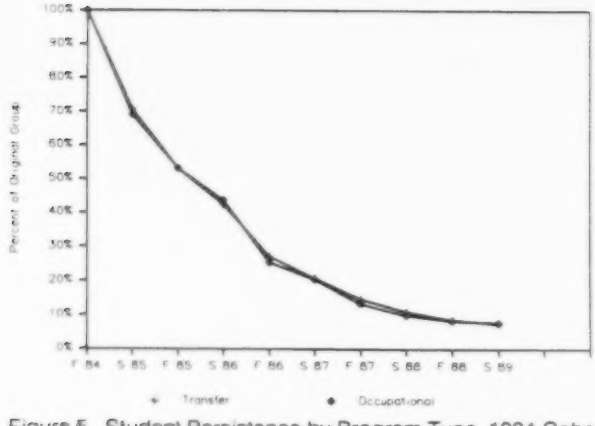

Figure 5. Student Persistence by Program Type, 1984 Cohort

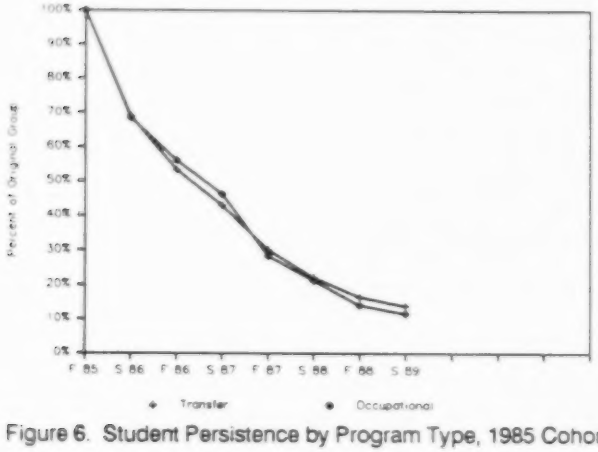

Figure 6. Student Persistence by Program Type, 1985 Cohort

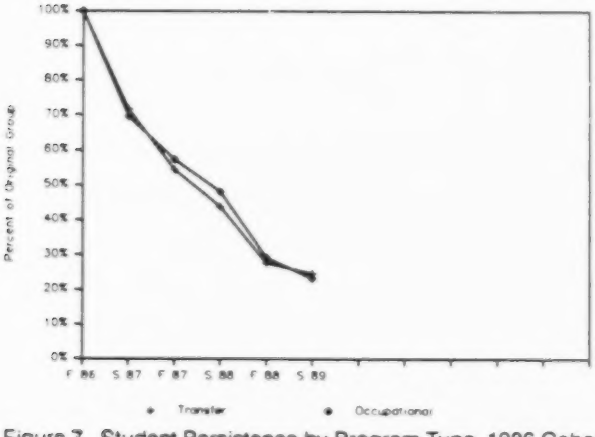

Figure 7. Student Persistence by Program Type, 1986 Cohort

Degree Graduation Rates

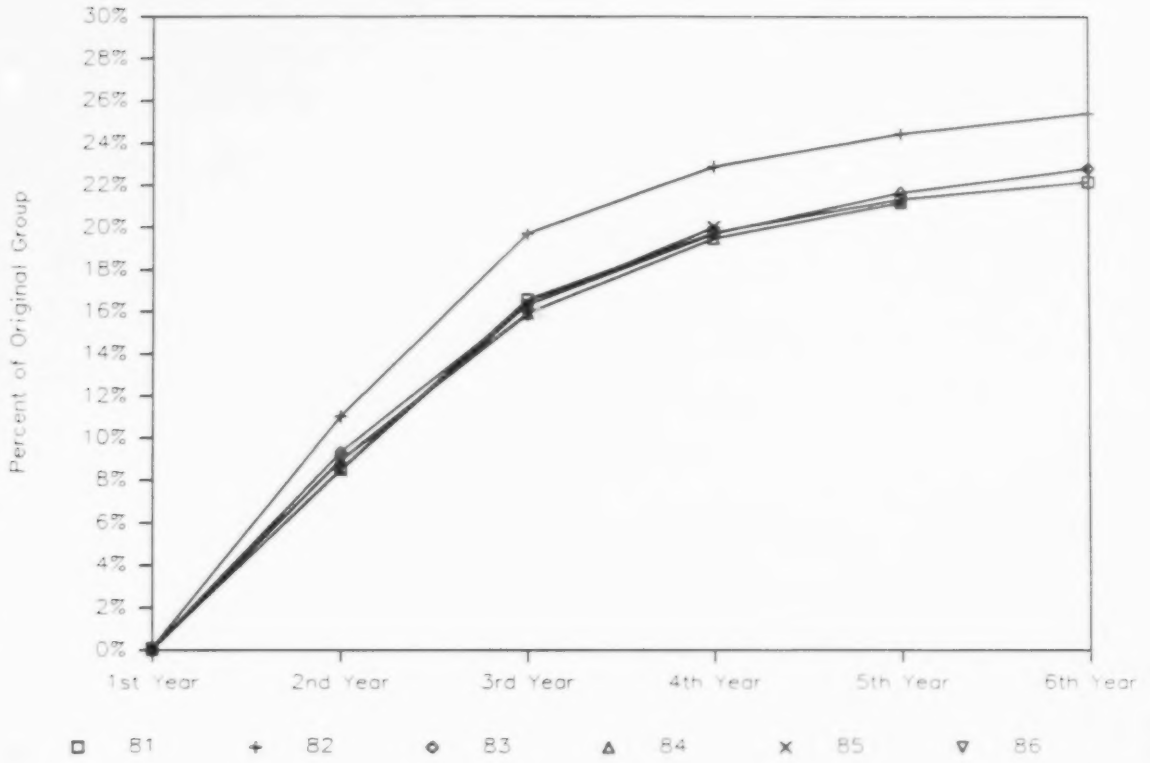

Figure 8. Degree Graduation Rates

Except for the 1982 cohort, the graduation rates of full-time degree students varied little from year to year. The 1982 cohort was clearly an exception, but the reason for the noticeably higher graduation rates for this group is as yet unexplained.

Although associate degrees are nominally two-year degrees, fewer than 10% of the new full-time degree students had graduated by the end of the second year. This number was more than doubled, however, by the end of the fourth year after initial enrollment.

Effect of Program Type on Degree Graduation Rates

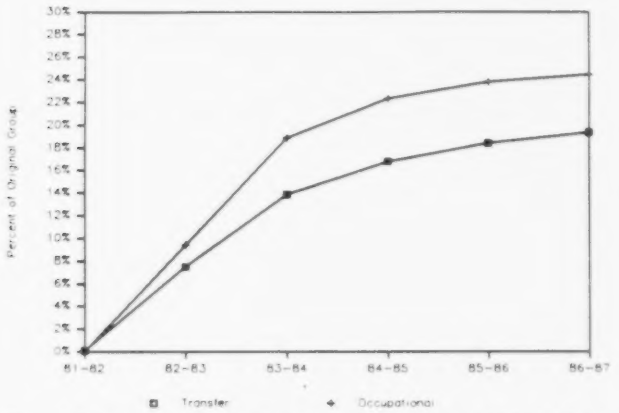

Figure 9. Degree Graduation Rates by Program, 1981 Cohort

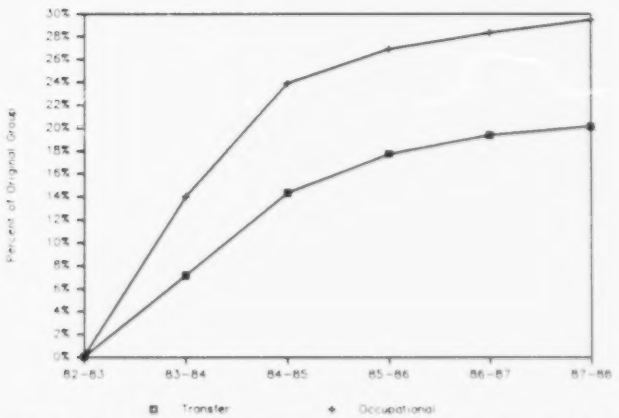

Figure 10. Degree Graduation Rates by Program, 1982 Cohort

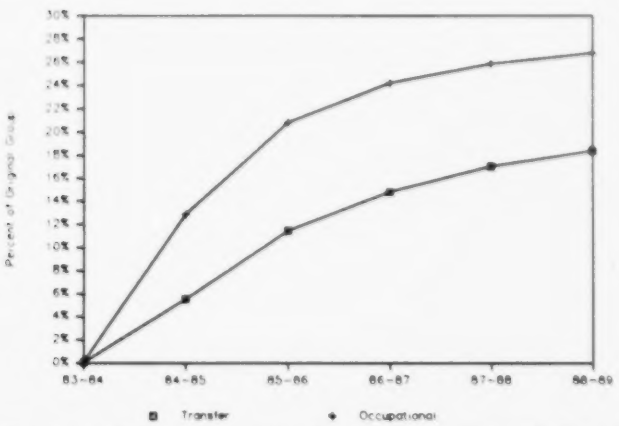

Figure 11. Degree Graduation Rates by Program, 1983 Cohort

Occupational degree students are somewhat more likely to graduate than are transfer degree students, despite the fact that the persistence of the two groups is remarkably similar.

The lower graduation rate for transfer students is likely because many transfer students see the baccalaureate degree, rather than the associate degree, as their goal and design their program for maximum transferability. If some course required for the associate degree is not required for the baccalaureate degree, they are apt to forgo it.

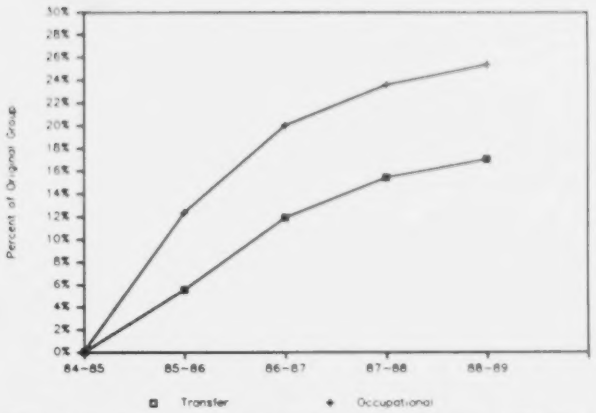

Figure 12. Degree Graduation Rates by Program, 1984 Cohort

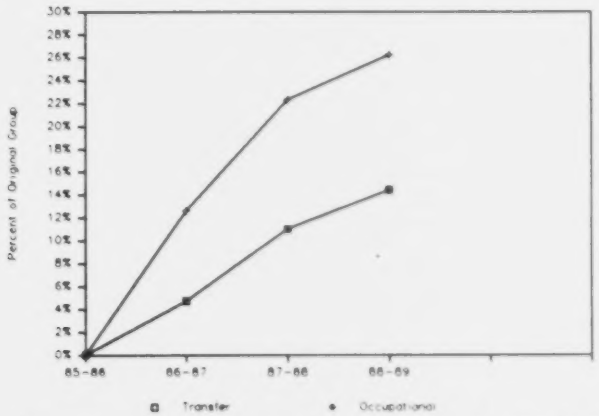

Figure 13. Degree Graduation Rates by Program, 1985 Cohort

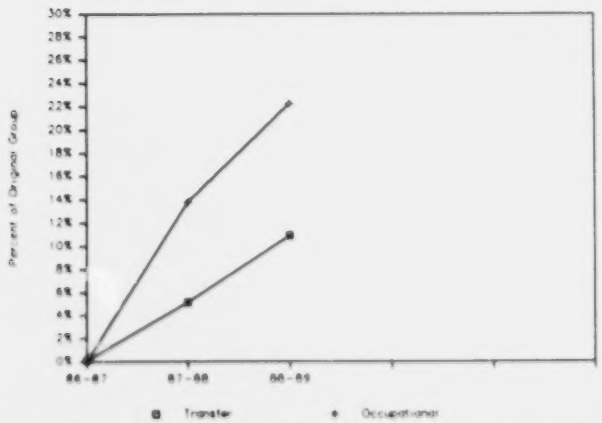

Figure 14. Degree Graduation Rates by Program, 1986 Cohort

DISCUSSION

Students who began their community college careers as new full-time degree students took much longer to complete their programs than the nominal two years for associate degrees. But many persisted well into their third and fourth years and ultimately graduated. The finding that more students graduated in their third and fourth years than graduated in two years is interesting and may be instructive to those who plan community college programs. Likewise, the persistence rates--and the seeming constancy of those rates--should be useful to those who project community college enrollments.

This brief study merely scratches the surface of potentially productive scrutiny of persistence and graduation rates of community college students. Since community college students are such a diverse group, this may best be done by studying various subsets of the community college population, such as the new full-time degree students selected for this review.

Appendix

Data

Persistence and Degree Graduation Rate of the Fall 1981
Cohort of Full-Time Degree Students

Term / Program	Enrolled #	Enrolled %	Current Graduates #	Current Graduates %	Cumulative Graduates #	Cumulative Graduates %
Original Group						
Fall 1981						
Transfer	2,629	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Occupational	3,104	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	5,733	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
First Year						
Spring 1982						
Transfer	1,944	73.9%	3	0.1%	3	0.1%
Occupational	2,319	74.7%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	4,263	74.4%	3	0.1%	3	0.1%
Second Year						
Fall 1982						
Transfer	1,422	54.1%	0	0.0%	3	0.1%
Occupational	1,782	57.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	3,204	55.9%	0	0.0%	3	0.1%
Second Year						
Spring 1983						
Transfer	1,190	45.3%	194	7.4%	197	7.5%
Occupational	1,536	49.5%	293	9.4%	293	9.4%
TOTAL	2,726	47.5%	487	8.5%	490	8.5%
Third Year						
Fall 1983						
Transfer	717	27.3%	0	0.0%	197	7.5%
Occupational	836	26.9%	0	0.0%	293	9.4%
TOTAL	1,553	27.1%	0	0.0%	490	8.5%
Third Year						
Spring 1984						
Transfer	529	20.1%	167	6.4%	364	13.8%
Occupational	613	19.7%	293	9.4%	586	18.9%
TOTAL	1,142	19.9%	460	8.0%	950	16.6%

Persistence and Degree Graduation Rate of the Fall 1981
Cohort of Full-Time Degree Students -- Continued

Term / Program	Enrolled #	Enrolled %	Current Graduates #	Current Graduates %	Cumulative Graduates #	Cumulative Graduates %
Fourth Year						
Fall 1984						
Transfer	337	12.8%	0	0.0%	364	13.8%
Occupational	380	12.2%	0	0.0%	586	18.9%
TOTAL	717	12.5%	0	0.0%	950	16.6%
Fourth Year						
Spring 1985						
Transfer	242	9.2%	77	2.9%	441	16.8%
Occupational	289	9.3%	106	3.4%	692	22.3%
TOTAL	531	9.3%	183	3.2%	1,133	19.8%
Fifth Year						
Fall 1985						
Transfer	232	8.8%	0	0.0%	441	16.8%
Occupational	239	7.7%	0	0.0%	692	22.3%
TOTAL	471	8.2%	0	0.0%	1,133	19.8%
Fifth Year						
Spring 1986						
Transfer	157	6.0%	43	1.6%	484	18.4%
Occupational	192	6.2%	47	1.5%	739	23.8%
TOTAL	349	6.1%	90	1.6%	1,223	21.3%
Sixth Year						
Fall 1986						
Transfer	173	6.6%	0	0.0%	484	18.4%
Occupational	201	6.5%	0	0.0%	739	23.8%
TOTAL	374	6.5%	0	0.0%	1,223	21.3%
Sixth Year						
Spring 1987						
Transfer	130	4.9%	25	1.0%	509	19.4%
Occupational	178	5.7%	21	0.7%	760	24.5%
TOTAL	308	5.4%	46	0.8%	1,269	22.1%

Persistence and Degree Graduation Rate of the Fall 1982
Cohort of Full-Time Degree Students

Term / Program	Enrolled #	Enrolled %	Current Graduates #	Current Graduates %	Cumulative Graduates #	Cumulative Graduates %
Original Group						
Fall 1982						
Transfer	2,688	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Occupational	3,472	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	6,160	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
First Year						
Spring 1983						
Transfer	1,993	74.1%	1	0.0%	1	0.0%
Occupational	2,563	73.8%	6	0.2%	6	0.2%
TOTAL	4,556	74.0%	7	0.1%	7	0.1%
Second Year						
Fall 1983						
Transfer	1,467	54.6%	0	0.0%	1	0.0%
Occupational	2,041	58.8%	0	0.0%	6	0.2%
TOTAL	3,508	56.9%	0	0.0%	7	0.1%
Second Year						
Spring 1984						
Transfer	1,213	45.1%	191	7.1%	192	7.1%
Occupational	1,649	47.5%	481	13.9%	487	14.0%
TOTAL	2,862	46.5%	672	10.9%	679	11.0%
Third Year						
Fall 1984						
Transfer	724	26.9%	0	0.0%	192	7.1%
Occupational	922	26.6%	0	0.0%	487	14.0%
TOTAL	1,646	26.7%	0	0.0%	679	11.0%
Third Year						
Spring 1985						
Transfer	530	19.7%	193	7.2%	385	14.3%
Occupational	640	18.4%	342	9.9%	829	23.9%
TOTAL	1,170	19.0%	535	8.7%	1,214	19.7%

Persistence and Degree Graduation Rate of the Fall 1982
Cohort of Full-Time Degree Students -- Continued

Term / Program	Enrolled #	Enrolled %	Current Graduates #	Current Graduates %	Cumulative Graduates #	Cumulative Graduates %
Fourth Year						
Fall 1985						
Transfer	328	12.2%	0	0.0%	385	14.3%
Occupational	442	12.7%	0	0.0%	829	23.9%
TOTAL	770	12.5%	0	0.0%	1,214	19.7%
Fourth Year						
Spring 1986						
Transfer	260	9.7%	92	3.4%	477	17.7%
Occupational	323	9.3%	105	3.0%	934	26.9%
TOTAL	583	9.5%	197	3.2%	1,411	22.9%
Fifth Year						
Fall 1986						
Transfer	219	8.1%	0	0.0%	477	17.7%
Occupational	287	8.3%	0	0.0%	934	26.9%
TOTAL	506	8.2%	0	0.0%	1,411	22.9%
Fifth Year						
Spring 1987						
Transfer	173	6.4%	44	1.6%	521	19.4%
Occupational	220	6.3%	50	1.4%	984	28.3%
TOTAL	393	6.4%	94	1.5%	1,505	24.4%
Sixth Year						
Fall 1987						
Transfer	175	6.5%	0	0.0%	521	19.4%
Occupational	237	6.8%	0	0.0%	984	28.3%
TOTAL	412	6.7%	0	0.0%	1,505	24.4%
Sixth Year						
Spring 1988						
Transfer	129	4.8%	20	0.7%	541	20.1%
Occupational	198	5.7%	40	1.2%	1,024	29.5%
TOTAL	327	5.3%	60	1.0%	1,565	25.4%

Persistence and Degree Graduation Rate of the Fall 1983 Cohort of Full-Time Degree Students

Term / Program	Enrolled #	Enrolled %	Current Graduates #	Current Graduates %	Cumulative Graduates #	Cumulative Graduates %
Original Group						
Fall 1983						
Transfer	2,707	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Occupational	2,962	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	5,669	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
First Year						
Spring 1984						
Transfer	1,972	72.8%	1	0.0%	1	0.0%
Occupational	2,083	70.3%	3	0.1%	3	0.1%
TOTAL	4,055	71.5%	4	0.1%	4	0.1%
Second Year						
Fall 1984						
Transfer	1,419	52.4%	0	0.0%	1	0.0%
Occupational	1,593	53.8%	0	0.0%	3	0.1%
TOTAL	3,012	53.1%	0	0.0%	4	0.1%
Second Year						
Spring 1985						
Transfer	1,138	42.0%	148	5.5%	149	5.5%
Occupational	1,268	42.8%	378	12.8%	381	12.9%
TOTAL	2,406	42.4%	526	9.3%	530	9.3%
Third Year						
Fall 1985						
Transfer	713	26.3%	0	0.0%	149	5.5%
Occupational	721	24.3%	0	0.0%	381	12.9%
TOTAL	1,434	25.3%	0	0.0%	530	9.3%
Third Year						
Spring 1986						
Transfer	542	20.0%	161	5.9%	310	11.5%
Occupational	558	18.8%	235	7.9%	616	20.8%
TOTAL	1,100	19.4%	396	7.0%	926	16.3%

Persistence and Degree Graduation Rate of the Fall 1983 Cohort of Full-Time Degree Students -- Continued

Term / Program	Enrolled #	Enrolled %	Current Graduates #	Current Graduates %	Cumulative Graduates #	Cumulative Graduates %
Fourth Year Fall 1986						
Transfer	406	15.0%	0	0.0%	310	11.5%
Occupational	370	12.5%	0	0.0%	616	20.8%
TOTAL	776	13.7%	0	0.0%	926	16.3%
Fourth Year Spring 1987						
Transfer	302	11.2%	91	3.4%	401	14.8%
Occupational	291	9.8%	101	3.4%	717	24.2%
TOTAL	593	10.5%	192	3.4%	1,118	19.7%
Fifth Year Fall 1987						
Transfer	269	9.9%	0	0.0%	401	14.8%
Occupational	256	8.6%	0	0.0%	717	24.2%
TOTAL	525	9.3%	0	0.0%	1,118	19.7%
Fifth Year Spring 1988						
Transfer	192	7.1%	61	2.3%	462	17.1%
Occupational	189	6.4%	49	1.7%	766	25.9%
TOTAL	381	6.7%	110	1.9%	1,228	21.7%
Sixth Year Fall 1988						
Transfer	195	7.2%	0	0.0%	462	17.1%
Occupational	195	6.6%	0	0.0%	766	25.9%
TOTAL	390	6.9%	0	0.0%	1,228	21.7%
Sixth Year Spring 1989						
Transfer	197	7.3%	36	1.3%	498	18.4%
Occupational	175	5.9%	28	0.9%	794	26.8%
TOTAL	372	6.6%	64	1.1%	1,292	22.8%

Persistence and Degree Graduation Rate of the Fall 1984
Cohort of Full-Time Degree Students

Term / Program	Enrolled #	Enrolled %	Current Graduates #	Current Graduates %	Cumulative Graduates #	Cumulative Graduates %
Original Group						
Fall 1984						
Transfer	2,813	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Occupational	2,835	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	5,648	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
First Year						
Spring 1985						
Transfer	1,993	70.8%	2	0.1%	2	0.1%
Occupational	1,962	69.2%	4	0.1%	4	0.1%
TOTAL	3,955	70.0%	6	0.1%	6	0.1%
Second Year						
Fall 1985						
Transfer	1,498	53.3%	0	0.0%	2	0.1%
Occupational	1,510	53.3%	0	0.0%	4	0.1%
TOTAL	3,008	53.3%	0	0.0%	6	0.1%
Second Year						
Spring 1986						
Transfer	1,200	42.7%	155	5.5%	157	5.6%
Occupational	1,241	43.8%	346	12.2%	350	12.3%
TOTAL	2,441	43.2%	501	8.9%	507	9.0%
Third Year						
Fall 1986						
Transfer	761	27.1%	0	0.0%	157	5.6%
Occupational	720	25.4%	0	0.0%	350	12.3%
TOTAL	1,481	26.2%	0	0.0%	507	9.0%
Third Year						
Spring 1987						
Transfer	584	20.8%	178	6.3%	335	11.9%
Occupational	579	20.4%	216	7.6%	566	20.0%
TOTAL	1,163	20.6%	394	7.0%	901	16.0%

Persistence and Degree Graduation Rate of the Fall 1984 Cohort of Full-Time Degree Students -- Continued

Term / Program	Enrolled #	Enrolled %	Current Graduates #	Current Graduates %	Cumulative Graduates #	Cumulative Graduates %
Fourth Year						
Fall 1987						
Transfer	412	14.6%	0	0.0%	335	11.9%
Occupational	377	13.3%	0	0.0%	566	20.0%
TOTAL	789	14.0%	0	0.0%	901	16.0%
Fourth Year						
Spring 1988						
Transfer	311	11.1%	98	3.5%	433	15.4%
Occupational	282	9.9%	101	3.6%	667	23.5%
TOTAL	593	10.5%	199	3.5%	1,100	19.5%
Fifth Year						
Fall 1988						
Transfer	243	8.6%	0	0.0%	433	15.4%
Occupational	236	8.3%	0	0.0%	667	23.5%
TOTAL	479	8.5%	0	0.0%	1,100	19.5%
Fifth Year						
Spring 1989						
Transfer	210	7.5%	46	1.6%	479	17.0%
Occupational	220	7.8%	51	1.8%	718	25.3%
TOTAL	430	7.6%	97	1.7%	1,197	21.2%

Persistence and Degree Graduation Rate of the Fall 1985 Cohort of Full-Time Degree Students

Term / Program	Enrolled #	Enrolled %	Current Graduates #	Current Graduates %	Cumulative Graduates #	Cumulative Graduates %
Original Group						
Fall 1985						
Transfer	2,943	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Occupational	2,641	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	5,584	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
First Year						
Spring 1986						
Transfer	2,034	69.1%	1	0.0%	1	0.0%
Occupational	1,809	68.5%	2	0.1%	2	0.1%
TOTAL	3,843	68.8%	3	0.1%	3	0.1%
Second Year						
Fall 1986						
Transfer	1,569	53.3%	0	0.0%	1	0.0%
Occupational	1,481	56.1%	0	0.0%	2	0.1%
TOTAL	3,050	54.6%	0	0.0%	3	0.1%
Second Year						
Spring 1987						
Transfer	1,264	42.9%	139	4.7%	140	4.8%
Occupational	1,218	46.1%	331	12.5%	333	12.6%
TOTAL	2,482	44.4%	470	8.4%	473	8.5%
Third Year						
Fall 1987						
Transfer	887	30.1%	0	0.0%	140	4.8%
Occupational	747	28.3%	0	0.0%	333	12.6%
TOTAL	1,634	29.3%	0	0.0%	473	8.5%
Third Year						
Spring 1988						
Transfer	647	22.0%	184	6.3%	324	11.0%
Occupational	560	21.2%	256	9.7%	589	22.3%
TOTAL	1,207	21.6%	440	7.9%	913	16.4%

Persistence and Degree Graduation Rate of the Fall 1985
Cohort of Full-Time Degree Students -- Continued

Term Program	Enrolled #	 %	Current Graduates #	 %	Cumulative Graduates #	 %
Fourth Year						
Fall 1988						
Transfer	477	16.2%	0	0.0%	324	11.0%
Occupational	368	13.9%	0	0.0%	589	22.3%
TOTAL	845	15.1%	0	0.0%	913	16.4%
Fourth Year						
Spring 1989						
Transfer	405	13.8%	101	3.4%	425	14.4%
Occupational	302	11.4%	104	3.9%	693	26.2%
TOTAL	707	12.7%	205	3.7%	1,118	20.0%

Persistence and Degree Graduation Rate of the Fall 1986 Cohort of Full-Time Degree Students

Term / Program	Enrolled #	Enrolled %	Current Graduates #	Current Graduates %	Cumulative Graduates #	Cumulative Graduates %
Original Group						
Fall 1986						
Transfer	3,518	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Occupational	2,729	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
TOTAL	6,247	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
First Year						
Spring 1987						
Transfer	2,522	71.7%	3	0.1%	3	0.1%
Occupational	1,899	69.6%	2	0.1%	2	0.1%
TOTAL	4,421	70.8%	5	0.1%	5	0.1%
Second Year						
Fall 1987						
Transfer	1,918	54.5%	0	0.0%	3	0.1%
Occupational	1,566	57.4%	0	0.0%	2	0.1%
TOTAL	3,484	55.8%	0	0.0%	5	0.1%
Second Year						
Spring 1988						
Transfer	1,540	43.8%	178	5.1%	181	5.1%
Occupational	1,311	48.0%	375	13.7%	377	13.8%
TOTAL	2,851	45.6%	553	8.9%	558	8.9%
Third Year						
Fall 1988						
Transfer	975	27.7%	0	0.0%	181	5.1%
Occupational	797	29.2%	0	0.0%	377	13.8%
TOTAL	1,772	28.4%	0	0.0%	558	8.9%
Third Year						
Spring 1989						
Transfer	865	24.6%	203	5.8%	384	10.9%
Occupational	632	23.2%	231	8.5%	608	22.3%
TOTAL	1,497	24.0%	434	6.9%	992	15.9%

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